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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[30 January 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Regional Environmental Effects of Turkey's Dam Projects*

Since a long time ago, dam construction by Turkey has turned into a major environmental challenge for the entire region. The Ilisu Dam is one of the big dams under construction in Turkey within framework of the GAP project (Guneydogu Anadolu Projesi), whose construction has started in 2006 and is to be finished in 2019. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers must be considered as vital arteries of the Middle East, because people in Turkey, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and the southwest of the Islamic Republic of Iran depend on their water. Since the aforesaid dam is located in southeast Turkey close to Iran's border with Iraq, its construction on the Tigris River, which then flows into Iraq, has had destructive effects on the environment both in Iraq and Iran, because the Tigris river eventually flows into Iran's Hoor al-Azim as well. If this dam is made operational, one of its major consequences will be drying up of Hoor al-Azim, which will be followed by major crises, including increasing amount of haze in the air, desertification and drought in those parts of Iran. At the end of the day, it will give rise to a major environmental catastrophe, which will affect large parts of the country. Therefore, reducing the flow of upstream waters into downstream parts of the Tigris could lead to homelessness of millions of people and badly damage rural livelihood and agriculture in downstream countries.

Construction of the Ilisu Dam on the Tigris River will prevent flow of 56 percent of the river's water into Iraq and subsequently Iran, and will have many environmental consequences in addition to stoking tensions between Turkey and neighboring countries. By building dams on the Tigris and Euphrates without due attention to flow right of downstream neighboring countries like Iraq, Syria and Iran, and also through inattention to experts' warnings, Turkey has practically violated the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Completion of this dam will cause great environmental and human rights problems for the entire region the most important of which include immigration, security and social problems, soil drying and erosion, intensification of wind erosion, production of dust and haze, increased poverty, and immigration of vulnerable people to the vicinity of big cities.

To reduce the hazards that this project may pose to people in Turkey's neighboring countries, the government in Ankara must take environmental issues quite seriously when it comes to exploitation of water resources and the implementation of the GAP project. Therefore, it must address the extraterritorial effects of the construction, reach a regional consensus on the issue and start regional cooperation with the countries that will be at serious loss as a result of this project.

Recommendations

A reason behind the establishment of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was to draw attention to the issue of dust and haze as one of the most important concerns of this convention. We, therefore, call on the Turkish government to pay attention to the contents of this convention.

The Turkish government must take an overarching approach to management of drainage basins, because if a country ignores the rights of downstream countries, it will actually cause destruction of those lands. In the next stage, this measure will give rise to political, social and even security problems, which will certainly affect all regional countries while jeopardizing international peace and security as well.

We ask Turkey to prevent an environmental disaster in Iran's Hoor al-Azim by paying due attention to overarching management of drainage basins that go well beyond its political borders. It is necessary for the Turkish government to engage in diplomatic cooperation with regional countries to prevent environmental effects of this project. Diplomatic apparatuses of concerned countries, including Iran, Iraq and Syria, as well as the international institutions such as the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance must join hands and demand respect for the flow right of lagoons and rivers that are downstream to these two main rivers. In doing this, they will help protect biodiversity in Turkey's neighboring countries as well.

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*Pouya Institute for Communications and Social Development, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.